

Especially for practitioners working with toddlers! 

Sounds Good

 *Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

Toddlers are starting to understand the many uses for language. They enjoy experimenting with the different noises they can make and the different results they get from adults around them. Join the toddlers in your care in their verbal play. This will motivate them to pay attention to and use language more readily.

What is the practice?

Encourage and gently direct your toddlers' play with words and sounds. Imitate and expand on their words. Join them in songs and rhymes. Show appropriate use of language in your classroom. Caregivers' positive responses to toddlers' verbal output will help them learn about the sounds and uses of language.

What does the practice look like?

Support your toddlers' verbal play and speech. Join in with their invented songs and replace words in familiar songs or nursery rhymes with children's names. Imitate animal noises together. Use toddlers' gestures to interpret and expand on a child's meaning.

How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities each day in a classroom for children to playfully interact with you or their peers. Use words and sounds and play games that support these skills.

- Recite nursery rhymes or sing rhyming songs with children, letting them fill in the rhyming words on their own. Point out which words "go together" or "sound the same." You can increase interest in these songs and rhymes by making up versions about the children in your class.
- When children are playing with animals, trucks, baby dolls, or anything else, elicit their ideas about what sounds those objects would make. Most toddlers enjoy these activities. They help children think about the nature of sounds. For example, would a truck have a deep, loud sound, or a high-pitched squeak?
- During a group activity such as snack time, encourage toddlers to think of words that describe what they are eating. You can model appropriate choices, like sweet, salty, cold, hard, crunchy, in order to give them some ideas. Variations on this game can be played any time. As a group, come up with words that describe a particular toy (big, soft, brown) or event (fun, loud, stinky). This helps children pay attention to the world around them and increases their vocabularies.
- Teaching children songs and rhymes can be made more enjoyable and effective by accompanying them with hand or body movements. This can increase toddlers' understanding of the words as well as motivate them to participate and limit fidgeting.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Do children in your care enjoy playing with words and sounds?
- Do they attempt to use words in a variety of contexts, such as requesting something, singing, and describing their experience?
- Do they show a gradual shift from using primarily gestures to using more words?

Take a look at more verbal play with toddlers

Rhyming Fingerplay

It is almost Halloween. Mr. Tom, an early interventionist, decides to teach a fingerplay about pumpkins to the children he visits at their homes. At Bradley's house, he sits on the living room floor with the toddler and his mother. They look at pictures of pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns. Bradley's mom explains that he is going to be a fireman for Halloween. Then, Mr. Tom shows them how each of his five fingers can be a pumpkin in the fingerplay. Bradley and Mom practice bending and unbending their fingers like Mr. Tom does. "I'm going to read it to you first," Mr. Tom says. "Listen for words that rhyme, or that sound the same." After reciting it once, he encourages Bradley and his mom to join in by moving their hands as he does. He asks them to guess what words might come next at the end of each line. The gestures that accompany the words help Bradley make the connection between what he hears and real objects. They also help him remember what comes next in the sequence.



What's She Saying?



Ms. Lynn's class took a recent field trip to a farm. She collaborates with Bev, her center's early interventionist, to encourage her toddlers' continuing interest in the animals they saw. They stock the blocks and dramatic play centers of her classroom with farm animal toys of different sizes and breeds. Some of the toddlers in the blocks center are working at building "barns" and "fences" for the animals they find there. "Look, you've got that cow all fenced in," Ms. Lynn tells one child. "What's she saying?" The boy grins and gives a loud moo. "That cow sounds mad!" Bev says. "How would she sound if she was scared?" Another child offers a quiet, uncertain moo. The children laugh. "Hungry?" one child asks the child with the lion. Ms. Lynn plays alongside the toddlers, inventing appropriate sounds to go with the feelings and thoughts of their animals.

Imitating Sounds

In Ms. Lauren's inclusive toddler class, she and the early interventionist use songs and rhymes to engage children in verbal play. Ms. Lauren has the children at tables playing with play dough. Rita, the early interventionist, sits down with Luke, who has been diagnosed with speech and language delay. "What are you making, Luke?" she asks, and when he does not respond, Rita imitates Luke's motions. "I'm doing that too," she says, waiting for him to look at her play dough. When he does, he points and vocalizes. Ms. Lauren imitates the same sounds he is making, and adds to it: "I'm rolling this out flat." Luke pounds his play dough flat too, then looks expectantly at Ms. Lauren. "What should we do next?" Rita asks him. Luke vocalizes again. Although the adults do not understand what he is saying, they both imitate his sounds and he laughs. They take turns imitating each other's noises and movements. Ms. Lauren and Rita interpret and expand on Luke's attempts at speech.

